



## **NOAA Fisheries Service Lists Puget Sound Steelhead as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act** (May 7, 2007)

### Today's Action

Today the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) announced that Puget Sound steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agency has determined that all naturally spawned winter-run and summer-run steelhead populations are "threatened," meaning they are likely to become an endangered species in the foreseeable future throughout all of their range.

That range includes steelhead from the river basins of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound and Hood Canal, Washington, bounded to the west by the Elwha River and to the north by the Nooksack River and Dakota Creek (inclusive). The listed group of steelhead – called a distinct population segment or DPS under the ESA – includes only anadromous (ocean-going) forms of *O. mykiss*, but not resident forms (commonly called rainbow trout). The listed DPS includes two winter-run steelhead hatchery stocks: the Green River natural and Hamma Hamma River.

The listing will become effective in 30 days from publication in the *Federal Register*, at which time federal agencies must consult with NOAA Fisheries on actions they carry out, fund or authorize. NOAA Fisheries Service intends to issue ESA protective regulations for Puget Sound steelhead and to identify areas that may warrant designation as critical habitat in separate rulemaking.

### Background

NOAA Fisheries Service first reviewed the status of Puget Sound steelhead during a 1996 review of West Coast steelhead. The agency determined then that steelhead in Puget Sound constituted a DPS that did not warrant listing under the ESA. In 2005, NOAA accepted a petition to re-evaluate the status of Puget Sound steelhead. The agency reviewed the new information and in March 2006 proposed to list the Puget Sound steelhead DPS as threatened under the ESA. Primary biological concerns include: (1) the widespread declines in adult abundance (total run size), despite significant reductions in harvest in recent years; (2) the threats to diversity posed by use of two hatchery steelhead stocks (Chambers Creek and Skamania) inconsistent with wild stock diversity throughout the DPS; (3) the declining diversity in the DPS, including the uncertain but weak status of summer-run fish in the DPS; and (4) a reduction in spatial structure for steelhead in the DPS.

After reviewing comments, new information, and the conclusions of scientists on the agency's biological review team (BRT), NOAA Fisheries concludes that the Puget Sound steelhead DPS warrants ESA listing as a threatened species. Key facts and findings include:

- The Puget Sound steelhead DPS includes more than 50 stocks of summer- and winter-run fish, the latter being the most widespread and numerous of the two run types. Most steelhead production occurs in northern Puget Sound where the Skagit and Snohomish rivers support the largest populations.
- The majority of hatchery steelhead stocks are not considered part of this DPS (and not listed) because they are more than moderately diverged from the local native populations.
- Resident *O. mykiss* (rainbow trout) occur within the range of Puget Sound steelhead, but are not part of the DPS because of marked differences in physical, physiological, ecological and behavioral characteristics.
- BRT scientists assessed the overall viability of this DPS and concluded that there is: (1) a high risk to the viability of Puget Sound steelhead because of declining productivity and abundance; (2) a moderate risk because of reduced spatial complexity of, and connectivity among, populations; and (3) a moderate risk because of the reduced life-history diversity of populations and the potential threats posed by artificial propagation and harvest practices in Puget Sound.
- NOAA Fisheries Service also concluded that, at present, protective efforts in Puget Sound do not substantially mitigate the factors threatening the future viability of steelhead, nor do they ameliorate the BRT's assessment of extinction risk.
- Other ESA-listed salmonids within the range of Puget Sound steelhead include Chinook salmon, Hood Canal summer-run chum salmon, and bull trout. NOAA Fisheries Service will continue to collaborate with tribal, federal, state and local entities to promote and improve the significant recovery efforts underway for these salmonids. Such groups include the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound and Hood Canal Summer Chum Restoration Initiative.

More information about the status review for Puget Sound steelhead, and ESA information for this and other salmonid species is available at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.